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BOOK REVIEWS.

L'Ouvrier américain. Par E. LEVASSEUR. Paris: L. LaRose, 1898. 2 vols., 8vo, pp. xviii + 634 and 516.

THE contents of this work may be inferred from the fact that it was undertaken at the instance of a scientific society in a foreign country (the French Academy of Moral and Political Science), for the information of Europeans, upon industrial life in the United States. The two thick volumes thus contain much matter which is already accessible to Americans and, at the same time, the attempt to describe so vast a field has made it impossible to give to particular subjects the intensive discussion which Americans would welcome. Nevertheless the book is so comprehensive, and M. Levasseur has performed his task so intelligently and carefully, that this must be accounted the most valuable account of the American working class which has yet appeared.

It opens with an extended account of the industrial system of the United States—the growth of wealth, the progressive concentration of industry, and the increasing employment of machinery. The workman and his employer are characterized; organizations designed to benefit the workman are described (trades unions loan associations, co-operative societies); and an account is given of the national and state labor laws. There is also a description of the life of the workingmen—their homes, food, clothing, amusements—and a discussion of various pertinent questions at present in debate. The work concludes with a very hopeful forecast of the conditions likely to be realized “in twenty or thirty years.”

Professor Levasseur declares himself a disciple of Roscher, and accordingly his description is presented with frequent reference to economic principles. Yet the theoretical discussion is by no means technical and it is always subordinate to the descriptive work. The author also formally professes his faith in the *laissez faire* doctrine, and his discussion of practical problems is constantly guided by the idea that men are usually best able to decide what is for their own individual interests. On specific points in this discussion many will differ from him; but, with all the importance which he allows to this doctrine, he

cannot well be regarded, here or elsewhere, as being a doctrinaire. He does not forget that a theory is always merely an instrument, never canonical, to be applied with frequent qualifications, or frequently suspended, in the presence of exceptional circumstances. Thus he admits that municipal gas works might perhaps be best. He regards trusts as in themselves a legitimate example of freedom in organization, though they may call for restraint by government when they prove subversive of liberty. In the name of liberty, also, he objects to laws which limit the hours of labor, whether of women or men. With reference to this principle, he finds a certain sort of comfort in the sweating system, observing that freedom of immigration has permitted the immigrants—victims of this system—to attain wages which are at any rate much superior to their wages in Europe. He opposes, likewise, laws restricting immigration, which are said to attack the liberty of the employers who have need of labor, and that of the foreign workmen who need employment. If, he adds, such laws are favorable to the American workmen of today, they “are not favorable to the development of riches in America,” and so they must indirectly impair the future welfare of the working class (Vol. I, p. 466). It is difficult to reconcile this cheerful view with the statement (pp. 488–9) that immigration will probably result, some day, in a fall of wages, as any possible increase in the wealth of the country, resulting from “liberty,” or otherwise, can confer advantage upon the laborer only as it increases his real wages.

It is easy to see that the total mass of wealth in the United States will probably be increased by addition to the number of producers, but an increase in the mass of national wealth is not desirable if it is conditioned upon a disproportionate increase in the number of those who are to share it. The chief primary cause of high wages in the United States has been the abundance of good land, constituting, in effect, a vast store of capital awaiting the settler. With the arrival of immigrant laborers the ratio of capital to labor is altered to the disadvantage of native laborers; for it is pretty well established in economics, that the rate of wages varies with that ratio. It is, however, probable that the growing productive power of the industrial population will so far counteract this tendency that immigration will make wages, not actually less than they have been, but merely less than they might be in the absence of immigrants.

Professor Levasseur appeals to the principle of liberty in behalf of the laborer who desires to immigrate, but it is certainly doubtful whether

this principle, as a principle of government, can be invoked in behalf of persons foreign to the government concerned.

The present economic conditions of the United States are made the occasion for considering what elements enter into the determination of wages. Partly by inference from conditions in the United States, Professor Levasseur gives a prominent place in the theory of wages to the productivity of labor, by workmen or by entrepreneurs, but he carefully subordinates this to the wide principle of "demand and supply," including among the elements affecting demand and supply, the influence of the standard of living, competition (among employers or workmen), the degree of wealth of the country at large and the amount of fixed and of circulating capital. He suggests somewhat boldly, with a quotation from Tocqueville, that the democratic spirit in the United States must tend to a gradual upward movement of wages. This proposition will doubtless meet with objection from some quarters, but it seems in a degree justified as it means simply that self-assertiveness by workmen may enable them to gain better terms.

It has already been implied that M. Levasseur looks with mistrust upon socialism. The wages system he represents as necessarily permanent.

There have always been wage-earners, even when the humblest tasks were mostly performed by slaves. Wage-earning which is, so to speak, inherent in the relations of men, has developed in proportion as individual liberty has become more general, and during the present epoch in proportion as industry has progressed. It will endure as long as liberty, and it will remain one of the necessary forms of social organization. . . . The present tendency toward the concentration of industry far from leading to the suppression of wages, increases the ratio of wage-earners to employers. . . . An organization of labor like that which the Saint Simonists dreamed of would be in reality not the end of the wages-system but universal wage-earning without guarantee or right of discussion and choice by the wage-earner.

Professor Levasseur has little but contempt for the socialistic experiments in the United States. He replies to Professor Ely's opinion that "the Shakers are the most successful and . . . at the same time the most promising example of communism in the United States," by denying that a society of this character promises anything "but a spectacle of singularity maintained for a century, as a monastic order might be, having no real development, with difficulty grouping about a half-religious, half-communistic creed, some thousands of adherents, in a country, which at the same time gained nearly sixty million souls."

The author recognizes that socialism has made little advance in the United States, but he fears that this failure will not continue, because as he thinks, an uneducated laborer cannot detect the essential weakness of the socialist program. He can take account only of its promises which must appeal irresistibly to his philanthropic as well as to his selfish impulses. In this M. Levasseur does not take sufficient account of the American workman's essential "hard-headedness." He is characteristically cautious, rather incredulous, and to a considerable degree confident of his ability to cope with the difficulties which confront him. It is no doubt true that he has not thoroughly considered the deeper problems which socialism presents. While the agitation has been sufficient to acquaint large circles of workmen with its alluring promises, yet where these promises have been impressed most strongly, where indeed the socialist agitation has been carried on for decades, it has apparently made no real headway.

Professor Levasseur takes much the usual view of the workman's present condition. The average wages he estimates at \$1.75 to \$2.00. From a considerable array of price-tables, in large part collected by himself, he concludes that the commodities purchased by the laborer are on the whole, as dear in France as in the United States, though the "social power of money, that is to say, the sum necessary to secure a certain rank in society," is much less than in the United States.

The account of trades unions is generally satisfactory. The statement (Vol. II, page 435) that the trades union increases the number of strikes is at least open to doubt; as Professor Levasseur supports the proposition it is assuredly wrong. One who studies consecutively the history of individual unions must see that the tendency to strikes steadily declines as experience accumulates and organization becomes firmer and more systematic. It is hard to imagine what can have suggested the statement (Vol. I, pp, 261-2) that "the workmen belonging to a union ordinarily accord a passive obedience to the commands of their chiefs and upon a sign leave their work and go on a strike." In fact it is a nearly universal rule of trades union constitutions that strikes may be undertaken only after a vote of members (often a two-thirds or three-fourths vote is necessary), while the general officers of an organization have only a qualified veto upon the union's action. The officers are moreover generally more cautious than the men and their influence is most often in favor of peace.

The American Railway Union strike of 1894 (undertaken by the

way against the advice of the officers, including Mr. Debs), is made to appear much more alarming than it was in fact, by the statement that in the midst of it a large body of men marched upon the national capital (Vol. I, p. 534). Such a degree of aggressiveness the strikers never thought of exhibiting, and it is evident that M. Levasseur has identified the Coxey movement (occurring weeks earlier) with the great strike. The men who did march on Washington were a body representing themselves as workmen out of employment, professing only the purpose of petitioning Congress, and chiefly dangerous to owners of poultry. It is also of course an error to speak of the president calling upon the supreme court for its opinion on a point of law (Vol. I, p. 163) as the court gives decisions only in actual litigation. Again, the distinction between the two chief political parties as favoring or opposing the extension of Federal authority (Vol. I, p. 445) can no longer be accepted. It is indeed quite possible, or even probable, that the Democratic party would now be rather more ready than its opponent to allow any increase of Federal authority. It is not an accident that the Democrats have recently acted so often in conjunction with the somewhat socialistic Populists whose tendency is to widen the activity of governments of every kind—national, state, and municipal—without caring much whether one agency or another is employed.

Professor Levasseur writes in the most friendly spirit imaginable. He is always more inclined to excuse or approve than to find fault, exhibiting once more the readiness to appreciate the good qualities of a foreign nation, which so many French writers have recently shown with a rather astonishing frankness, in writing of their Saxon neighbors and which we have not been sufficiently ready to imitate with reference to France.

AMBROSE PARÉ WINSTON.

Problems of Modern Industry. BY SIDNEY and BEATRICE WEBB.
London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1898. 8vo, pp. 286.

THIS volume is a collection of articles, many of which have already appeared in the current magazines. With the exception of the first two essays, "The Diary of an Investigator" and "The Jews of East London," little will be found that is not contained in the author's more detailed work on Industrial Democracy. The present volume, therefore, will be of interest chiefly to those who have not access to